



## Tim Skubick: Lone bid on high-speed train service raises eyebrows

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Who better to blow the whistle on an MDOT train contract than railroad devotee and former state senator Joe Schwarz.

Off the political radar for months, the former GOP politician is back in the game and playing with trains, which he loves to do.

But he's not in love with the way the state transportation department is handling the bid on high-speed train service between Detroit and Chicago.



File Photo

The state is poised to offer 110 mph service but it needs some rolling stock to get things going and Mr. Schwarz is critical of the RFP (Request for Proposal) the agency drafted. He contends only one company could meet the requirements and therefore only one bid was received. Or as one P.R. guy alleges, the contract was written for one firm.

Time out, Mr. S. demands.

"This deal is not a good deal," he explains as he has asked the governor to restart the whole process so other companies can bid - not just Talgo, which is in line to get the job.

He complains Talgo has equipment that cannot withstand Michigan's grueling winters. He contends their trains would require the rejiggering of the railroad stations that handle Amtrak trains. And another \$30 million or so, not in the contract, would be needed to repair the trains.

Michigan P.R. guy John Truscott, hired by a Chicago firm that wants the job, suggests this whole thing is "smelly."

Mr. Schwarz is not willing to go that far, but he says, "I don't think they thought it through...the RFP was too narrow."

Tim Hoeffner from MDOT who worked on the bid has a different take: "Joe is just wrong." Mr. Hoeffner

contends lots of companies were invited to the pre-bid meeting and "we were surprised that we only got one proposal."

This has been an expensive project with the feds kicking in a cool \$338 million to upgrade the tracks between the two cities. Mr. Schwarz believes MDOT did a "superb" job on that, but not so much on the bid.

One-bid contracts do raise eyebrows in this town. It doesn't necessarily mean anything is wrong but in this case the former lawmaker wants to hit the re-boot button just to make sure and he's hoping the governor will push it.

*Watch "Off the Record with Tim Skubick" online anytime at [video.wkar.org](http://video.wkar.org)*

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## Ex-Senator Questions MDOT Train Deal

Former Republican Senator and train enthusiast Joe **SCHWARZ** is blowing the whistle for what he claims is the Michigan Department of Transportation attempting to purchase some high-speed train cars without letting others bid on the proposal.

The state is moving ahead with plans to install new rail service between Detroit and Chicago but the ex-Senator contends the request for proposal (RFP) was "way too narrow" and the company that is in line for the contract is not equipped to provide the 110-mile-an-hour service.

Appearing on *Off the Record* which will air Friday, Schwarz said the MDOT contract was constructed so that "there was only one company" that could meet the qualifications.

"The deal is not a good deal," he said because the rolling stock that the Talgo company wants to sell is tied up in litigation and the Spanish company's equipment, he believes, is not suitable to a Northern climate.

Tim **HOEFFNER**, MDOT's Director of the Office of Rail, said he has a lot of respect for Schwarz, but on this issue he believes "Joe is just wrong."

For starters, he said there was a pre-bid meeting where "any and all companies" who had an interest in what amount to an interim train car bid could come. Hoeffner said MDOT made it clear that they were looking at an aggressive time frame due to a contract with Amtrak expiring Oct. 1.

"We were surprised that we only got one proposal," he said. "We said the equipment had to be capable of operating at 110 miles an hour. It also has to meet all of the requirements for Amtrak and the (Federal Railroad Administration) and the freight railroads."

Hoeffner said MDOT is doing its due diligence in reviewing the technical components of the response. If the review, which should take between a month and six weeks, meets the technical and financial interest of the state of Michigan, MDOT will move forward, but that decision has not yet been made, he said.

A Chicago firm that wanted to bid on the contract has hired local public relations specialist John **TRUSCOTT** and he says the arrangement with MDOT is "smelly."

Schwarz would not go that far, but he does believe, "I don't think they thought it through" and may have rushed the contract to get the project off the ground.

MDOT is familiar with the Chicago firm in question, however MDOT wanted to see proof that they could back up their proposals for railroad cars and haven't seen it, yet.

In addition to the alleged shortfalls with Talgo, the former lawmaker and one-time gubernatorial candidate also reports that equipment is not compatible with the train stations that dot the route between the two cities and he predicts expensive upgrades would be needed to accommodate that equipment.

Millions of dollars, currently not in the RFP, would be required to service the trains if the state purchases them.

Schwarz, the former mayor of Gov. Rick **SNYDER**'s hometown of Battle Creek, said he has talked to the Governor about all this and is requesting the project be re-drafted and then re-bid.

The former congressman did congratulate the department for doing "superb" work on upgrading the tracks to accommodate the higher speed trains under a project that has seen over \$335 million in federal money poured into the project.

Schwarz argues the state must own this equipment because the future of Amtrak is unclear given the sentiment in Congress against the train system.

The OTR broadcast can be seen Friday afternoon at [www.otr.org](#).